

Virginia Department of Emergency Management

The Virginia Department of Emergency Management works closely with local government, state and federal agencies and voluntary organizations to ensure a comprehensive, efficient and effective response to emergencies and disasters throughout the state.

From our earliest days as the Virginia Office of Civil Defense, VDEM has been there to lend a hand through numerous events, large and small, ensuring that the full resources of state government are available to assist citizens and localities in emergency and disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation of future risks.

Preparedness. No one can prevent disasters, but we can help communities prepare for them. Readiness for the next event requires an ongoing effort. VDEM develops and maintains state emergency plans that serve as the basis for the Commonwealth's all-hazards approach to emergency management.

The agency also offers a number of training courses to prepare local responders, communities, state agencies, volunteer groups and private industry to effectively manage large emergencies and disasters and their aftermath. VDEM is a leader in state terrorism awareness and response training as well as emergency management, hazardous materials, radiological emergency and search and rescue instruction.

Keeping the public informed is a critical element of effective disaster preparedness and response. In cooperation with local broadcasters, VDEM coordinates the use of the Emergency Alert System to warn citizens of life- or property-threatening events.

To help citizens minimize their risks, VDEM also works with the National Weather Service and local emergency managers to conduct intensive annual public awareness campaigns promoting tornado, hurricane, lightning and winter weather safety.

Response. VDEM manages and maintains core staffing for the Virginia Emergency Operations Center, which serves as the hub of state operations when emergencies and disasters strike or threaten Virginia. Located in a secure underground facility in Richmond, the VEOC is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week to respond to requests for state assistance throughout the Commonwealth. These calls range from hazardous materials incidents to search and rescue missions, coordinating everything from drinking water and generators to bulldozers for debris removal.

Recovery. Beyond the immediate public safety needs associated with an event, disasters cause significant economic and environmental impacts that can disrupt a community's quality of life for years to come. VDEM works to ensure that affected localities have the support needed to begin rebuilding. Assistance can take three forms:

- *Individual Assistance* for individuals, families and businesses
- *Public Assistance* for localities, state agencies and certain nonprofit groups
- *Hazard mitigation* funds for the state and localities to reduce or eliminate vulnerability to future threats

Mitigation. If “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” then any attempt to minimize or mitigate the impact of future disasters is truly priceless. As Virginia is most vulnerable to hurricanes and flooding, VDEM has emphasized planning in these areas. Mitigation efforts include local building code enforcement and improved land use and development standards. By combining the resources of federal, state and local governments as well as individual citizens, together we can create more disaster-resistant communities.

Virginia’s disaster and emergency risks include:

Natural Disasters – Floods and flash floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, winter weather hazards, heat waves and droughts, earthquakes, wildfires

Technological Emergencies and Disasters – Nuclear power plant emergencies, hazardous materials spills and releases, widespread power outages, vital resource shortages, accidents involving nuclear weapons or nuclear shipments, nuclear war, terrorism

Search and Rescue Emergencies – Lost or missing persons, missing or overdue aircraft, wilderness rescue of injured persons, cave rescues, water and swiftwater rescues, trench rescue and cave-ins, disaster search and rescue (collapsed structures, flash flooding, hurricanes, etc.)

Major Initiatives

- The Office of Training and Exercises conducted 366 Emergency Management courses and trained more than 8,400 students. Outside the classroom, Virginia residents completed 118,602 Independent Study courses through the FEMA Emergency Management Institute. The Office of Training and Exercises also developed and conducted 20 discussion- and operations-based Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program events with more than 2,200 participants.
- The 2007 Virginia Emergency Response Team Exercise, or VERTEX, was a four-day training event and included more than 40 public and private agencies and organizations. In 2008, VERTEX expanded to include a series of eight related exercises and drills to address various elements of the state’s response plans. The exercise scenarios include an ice storm with widespread power outages, terrorist attacks, evacuation and sheltering, supply distribution, reversal of I-64 as an evacuation drill, and pandemic influenza response. During each exercise, response personnel from state and local governments and volunteer groups will review and practice their emergency operations functions to evaluate the skills needed during an actual emergency.
- Local governments in central Virginia and Hampton Roads are getting a new satellite-based digital alerting system that will allow them to keep communication with the Virginia Emergency Operations Center in the event of phone or Internet loss. The Emergency Management Network, or EMnet, also lets localities send Emergency Alert System messages directly to their local media during emergencies and disasters. It is the Commonwealth’s primary means of issuing Emergency Alert System messages. In addition, the VEOC is installing satellite communications to provide dedicated communications with field units during a disaster and to serve as backup communications for the center.
- VDEM, in collaboration with several other state agencies, launched the Ready Virginia campaign, a statewide public education effort to prepare Virginians for all hazards. Based on the Department of Homeland Security’s national Ready campaign, Ready Virginia encourages

families, businesses and those with special needs to prepare for disasters through three steps: get a kit, make a plan and stay informed. The campaign's online presence ReadyVirginia.gov and its Spanish sister site ListoVirginia.gov are all-in-one sources for preparedness information for hazards and threats in the Commonwealth, from human-caused emergencies to natural disasters.

- VDEM has formed a public/private partnership with four-year colleges and community colleges, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and the Virginia Attorney's Office to create templates that institutions of higher learning can use to create an emergency operations plan. The templates will be scalable to any size institution and will include guidance for fulfilling each of the 17 emergency support functions outlined in the National Response Framework.